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EDUCATION POLICY: FROM LEGISLATURES TO CLASSROOMS
EDUC 350/550, POST 340, Spring 2017
Wednesdays 6:00-9:00 pm
Location: HBH 427

Instructor: Scott Hochberg
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For additional information, please also see the Course Information document on Owlspace.

Schedule and Assignments

UPDATED 4/5/17

Please note: Topics to be covered and when they are covered will vary due to the activities of the Texas Legislature and courts, the specific interests of the students, opportunities for guest speakers, etc. The schedule may also be changed to provide sufficient time for class participation depending on the number of students enrolled in the class.

All assignments are to be considered tentative until assigned by the instructor in class.

1/11 **Legislating Education Policy**

- Who's in charge here? Who makes education policy, and who influences them?
- Legislative simulation. Students will play roles of various interests in arguing for or against proposed legislation related to special education policy.

Task (Due ASAP):
All students **must** have a criminal background check for the in-school observations that will occur in February. If you took an education course in Fall 2016 and completed a criminal background check, you do not need to complete another. Otherwise, please complete this task as soon as possible, so your school visit will not be delayed.

To initiate a criminal background check, please click this link:
https://HoustonISD.org/VIPSLogin
It is also shown in the class Resources folder on Owlspace.

Reading Assignment (General Articles Folder) (Due 1/17):
Kinder Education Report **Post 5 takeaways** to Forum by 11:59 pm on Tuesday before the next class.

1/18 **Legislating Education Policy – continued**

- Why do we have a system of public education? What should be its goals?
- Discuss Kinder Study.
- How does the Texas Legislature work and how do you find information about what it is doing?

Curriculum Wars -- What gets taught to whom, who decides, and how do they decide?

- Discuss various levels of curriculum determination, from diploma requirements to lesson plans
- Introduce overall curriculum battles
    - National curriculum standards vs standards vs local decisions
    - Experts vs democracy
- Discuss criteria for evaluation curriculum standards.

Reading and Class Participation Assignment (Due 1/25): Read "The State of State Standards—and the Common Core —in 2010", pp 1-32 plus the section for your state. (Curriculum Wars Folder) Be prepared to discuss how your state was rated in this report compared to the Common Core standards.

Oral Presentation Assignment (Due 1/25): Choose three bills to track during the legislative session. Post the bill numbers on the class bill tracking list to avoid duplication with other students, and also post to your personal bill tracking list.

The link to the class bill tracking list is in the class Resources in Owlspace.
The login email for the class bill tracking list is scott.hochberg@rice.edu .
The password is: EDUC350

Select one of your three bills to present to the class.

- Figure out what the bill does, why it was proposed (without asking anyone in the legislature or their staff), what obstacles it may face.
- Consider:
    - Who proposed the bill and where is the district they are from? How does it reflect the author's political philosophy, if applicable?

  - What are the characteristics of the school districts that this member represents and do those district characteristics relate to why this member proposed this bill?
  - Did they propose it or something like it in previous sessions?
  - What will it cost?
  - Who are the groups likely to be for or against it and why?
- Prepare a short presentation (5-7 minutes) about the bill for the class.
- As the legislative session progresses, you will update the class on the progress of this legislation.

1/25 **PLEASE BRING LEGAL IDENTIFICATION TO CLASS, SO THAT YOU CAN BE CLEARED FOR YOUR SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS. Dr. Whitford will come to our class at 6:30 to make copies of your documents and schedule your class observation date.**

Curriculum Wars – continued

- Discuss state standards evaluations from Fordham report.
- What should a student have to learn to earn a diploma?
  - Class exercise – Algebra II EOC
  - Watch debate over Texas graduation requirements, and discuss

Legislating Education Policy - continued

- Class Presentations on legislation.

Video Assignment (Curriculum Wars Folder) (Due 1/31):
View "The Revisionaries", a documentary about the State Board of Education's curriculum adoption process. Runtime is approx 1 hr 23 mins. **Post 5 takeaways** to Forum by the end of Tuesday before the next class.

Class Participation Assignment (Due 2/1): Compare the Common Core Curriculum to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for a subject and grade level of your choice (Curriculum Wars Folder).

How are they similar or different? You might want to compare such things as difficulty, level of detail, clarity, bias toward or against particular teaching philosophy (e.g. phonics vs. whole language), coherence with other grade levels, etc.

Be prepared to present what you find.

Reading Assignment (Due 2/1): "The Un-Lobbyists" and "The Lobbyists Lament" (Lobbying Folder). Short prep pieces for Ms. Ford's presentation.

2/1 **Legislating Education Policy - continued**

- **Guest Speaker – Ms. Victoria Ford, K&L Gates, Austin.** The role of professional lobbyists in policymaking.

Curriculum Wars – continued

- Texas curriculum vs. the Common Core
  - How different are they?
  - What were the arguments for banning the Common Core?

- How Texas selects course content
  - Discuss "The Revisionaries"
  - Watch the Texas SBOE debate Social Studies textbooks

NOTE CHANGED DUE DATE: Reading Assignments (Due 2/7): The Signal and the Noise. Read Intro and Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8. **Post 5 takeaways** to Forum by the end of day before class.

NOTE CHANGED DUE DATE: Writing Assignment (Due 2/15): Texas is one of a small number of states not participating in the Common Core Standards initiative. Texas law goes so far as to prohibit use of the Common Core, stating that "A school district may not use common core state standards to comply with the requirement to provide instruction in the essential knowledge and skills at appropriate grade levels." Yet some argue that the Texas system for adopting curriculum is slow, expensive, and overly politicized.

Assume that you are a member of the State Board of Education, and are tasked with deciding whether Texas should adopt the Common Core Curriculum, or any part of it? What would you decide and why? Choose a position and justify it with, to the extent possible, evidence from objective research, including, but not limited to, the materials that have been assigned. Some things to consider:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Common Core?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Texas TEKS?
- Would adopting the Common Core, or some part of it, strengthen or weaken the Texas curriculum?
- What would the cost be of adopting the Common Core, and would the benefit be worth the cost? How do you know?
- What other "necessaries" must be in place for the Common Core, or any curriculum, to lead to improved learning?

Some Resources for Writing Assignment (Curriculum Wars Folder) (You may also use others):

- Mississippi Legislative Report Supporting the Common Core
- Against the Common Core – Hoover Institution
- The "Common Core" Standards Initiative: An Effective Reform Tool?

- Common Core in the Districts – An Early Look at Early Implementers

2/8 **Curriculum Wars – continued**

- Discuss writing assignment – finish common core discussion.
- Are Texas' standards actually teachable? (Discuss length and level of detail)

Data in Education Policy – Good, bad and ugly

- Discuss various ways data is used
- Discuss some examples of poor presentation or misrepresentation of education data

Classroom Observation Assignment:
It is a requirement of the Teacher Education program that each student observe teaching in an area high school during each course. Educ 350/550 has been assigned **February 13, 14 and 16** as observation days. The department will arrange for each student to observe in Bellaire HS on one of those days. We will discuss your observations when they have been completed by all students in the class.

2/15 **Data in Education Policy – continued**

- Discuss "The Signal and the Noise"

Accountability - How do we know the curriculum gets taught, and that students learn?

"Rarely is the question asked: Is our children learning?"
Governor George W. Bush, Jan. 11, 2000.

- Evolution of testing and accountability systems
- Class exercise – Create an accountability system

Task (Due 2/22):
Prepare a description of your topic for your final paper. The final paper will be a study of a particular policy question. The paper should describe the issue, propose a course of action (which could include keeping the status quo), present evidence supporting the action, and discuss the likely supporters and opponents to the proposal and how opposition might be overcome. As examples, some excellent papers from previous classes have been posted to Owlspace.

Reading Assignments (Due 2/21):

- "Avoidable Losses: High-Stakes Accountability and the Dropout Crisis"
- "Does School Accountability Lead to Increased Student Performance?"
  Post 5 takeaways (total for both readings) to Forum by the end of Tuesday before class.

2/22 **Note: As the Texas Legislature considers legislation, likely beginning around this week, each week's plan may be modified to accommodate student presentations on the progress of bills, plus discussions of current legislative actions.**

School Observations – Discussion

Accountability Issues - Continued

- Discuss readings – Potential benefits and harms of high-stakes testing
- What do school rating mean? Looking inside the Texas school rating system
- How are passing scores set?
- How are scores rolled up into campus and district ratings?

Writing Assignment (Due 3/1): Prepare a game plan for your research paper. Figure out the steps that you plan to follow to determine and justify your conclusion. For example, if you are proposing a new policy, how will you show that the policy is likely to have the desired outcome? What data and other information will you need, and how will you find and evaluate supporting and opposing arguments? The assignment can be done in outline, flowchart, or normal written form. It should be detailed enough that you could give it to a researcher and he/she could follow it and gather the information you need. Grading will be based on coverage of the topic and thoroughness.

3/1 **Accountability Issues – Continued**

- Proposed changes to the Texas rating system
- Figuring out if changes in ratings are real or the result of changes in the system?
- Pulling apart the Texas Projection Measure
- Do accountability systems work, and toward what ends
- Does every student need to be tested every year?

No Assignment for the coming week.

3/8 **Funding our Schools**

- Does money matter?
- What does education cost and why is there no single answer to that?
    - student effects
    - other differential cost
- Class exercise – cost examples
- Where does the money come from?
    - Types of taxes, characteristics of each
    - Implications of a local property tax based system
    - Class exercise –local tax examples
    - show real world examples

- How does the state system interact?
    - Class exercise – state/local sharing examples

Reading assignments (School Finance folder) (Due 3/21):

- Edgewood v Kirby, 1989
- Dietz Ruling Executive Summary
- Texas Supreme Court Ruling 2016

Post 5 takeaways (total) to Forum by the end of Tuesday before class.

3/15 **No Class – Spring Break**

3/22 **Funding our Schools – Continued**

- The recapture solution
- Where does the system fall short, and why is it so hard to fix?
- The schools turn to the courts – Discussion of Texas school finance cases.
    - Is the system efficient?
    - Is the system suitable?
    - Does the system represent an illegal statewide property tax?

Does One Size Fit All? – Special Populations Introduction

- General overview of special populations – what are various categories, how large a percentage of the student population, etc.

Reading assignments (Discipline folder) (Due 3/28):

- Teaching Interrupted.pdf (Read this one first)
- What Conditions Jeopardize and Support Safety in Urban Schools.pdf
- The Punishment Gap School Suspension and Racial Disparities in Achievement.pdf
- HISD Code of Conduct (Just scan – for reference only, just to get a feel for its level of detail and complexity)

Post 5 takeaways (total) for the first 3 articles to Forum by the end of Tuesday before class.

3/29 **School Discipline – Is there a "school-to-prison pipeline" and does it matter?**

- zero tolerance policies
- expulsion and suspension, alternative schools
- ticketing of students for school offenses
- impact on special populations

Participation Requirement (not graded) (Due 4/4):

Please post three questions for the "what's it like" discussion to the Forum by the end of Tuesday before class.

Writing Assignment (Special Populations Folder) (Due 4/5):

Choose from one of the following 2 policy questions relating to diverse learners.

Using the resources provided on Owlspace (and others at your option), write a paper structured as follows:

1.) State your position on the topic, and briefly explain the result that you think your position will achieve. (Example: "Students should not be placed in bilingual classes. Placement in single-language classes will lead to better proficiency in English, which is more important than moving forward as quickly as other students in core subjects….")

2.) Explain why your position is the best way to achieve your goal. Support your arguments with factual information from original sources. (For example, please do NOT quote a Washington Post article that in turn quotes another publication. Go to the actual source, and read the context.)

3.) Take note of important counter-arguments, and explain why they are incorrect.

4.) Conclude.

- **Gifted/talented: Should students be assigned to classes according to ability grouping?**

- **English as a second language: Should ESL students be taught in their primary language, or should they be immersed in English?**

4/5 **What's it like being a legislator? –** Students ask questions of the instructor

Does One Size Fit All? – Special Populations

Class discussions – policy issues re special populations

Discussion of Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE–1 – decided 3/22/17 by U.S. Supreme Court

Reading Assignment (School Governance Folder) (Due 4/11):

- Does School Board Leadership Matter?
- America's Public Schools Choice IS a Panacea
- Virtual Schools Study for the State of Georgia

Post 5 takeaways (total for three readings) to Forum by the end of Tuesday before class.

Takeaway Assignment (due 4/11):

Post 5 takeaways for the **entire course** to Forum by the end of Tuesday before class.

4/12 **Discuss Final Takeaways**

Blow up the system – Vouchers, Charters, Virtual Schools, Alternative Governance

- Are school boards the problem? Does democracy and local control really work?
- School choice options. Charters/Vouchers/Home Schooling/Magnets/Virtual
- Why do some charters work great and others crash and burn?

Oral Presentation Assignment (due 4/19):

In order for all students to benefit from each others' work on final papers, students will individually present their work to the class. It is understood that the papers may not be complete, but by this time the student should be far enough along to present the topic in an informative manner.

Presentations should be around 10 minutes, not including some additional time for questions from fellow students. Power Points and other visuals may be used but are not required. The instructor may give the student further guidance on the content of the final paper based on the presentation.

For grading purposes, these presentations will be one of the student's oral presentations (not part of the grade for the final paper).

4/19 **Student Final Paper Oral Presentations**

5/3 **Final Papers Due – End of Finals Week – Submit by email no later than 5:00 PM, 5/3/17**